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SIOUAN MYTHOLOGICAL TALES.

AMONG primitive tribes are heard time-honored tales that may be called *fables without morals*, which seem designed only to while away the time of the young, and children of a larger growth. Our Indians are no exceptions. The same stories are current among tribes remotely related so far as location, language, and tradition indicate.

An insignificant tribe of the Siouan family has, or quite recently had, a sort of fraternity called the medicine lodge. Members of distant tribes came to it for instruction, and it seems to have commanded respect a generation or more ago, but recently the Omaha dance has supplanted it.

From those who had received this instruction the following account was obtained, under promise not to reveal the informants' names lest the enmity of the tribe be incurred. According to this information, all the tales current among all northern tribes relate to the misadventures or heroic actions of "*four who never die*." These are, first, The Monster; second, The Sharper Who Makes a Fool of Himself; third, The Turtle; fourth, The Rabbit. Recently some of the exploits of a Blackfoot or Piegan, named Red Horn, were added to the list, the initiated at once recognizing him as one of the Immortal Four. No doubt they confer the same honor on other recent worthies.

For the sake of brevity, the most amusing character, the second, will be known by one of his local names, *Bladder*, which seems to indicate that his body resembled a bladder blown full of air. He is known to different tribes as the Clown, Spider, White Man, Silly Man; and the Assiniboinis call him the Ape. The *Old Man* of many tribes is either Bladder or the Monster.¹

By one account Bladder and the Monster were twins and the sons of the Turtle. Bladder hunted his brother all over the world to slay him, because his body was of stone and caused his mother's death. This version begins with the Turtle and a waterfowl on the waters of a universal flood, with the nuclei of the earth in mouth and bill, the one mud, the other grass, which were placed to grow on the Turtle's back. Some call the Turtle a Muskrat or Coyote, and the waterfowl seems to be the Wonderful Bird that flaps its wings for rain, and the noise to us is thunder!

But the version of the medicine lodge says the Monster was the

¹ Monster = Wah-reh-ksau-kee-ka; Bladder = Wa-teh-gho-ga; Sharper = Was-chang-ka-ga, — Winnebago dialect. Sharper = Unktomi, — Siouan dialect. Rabbit and Turtle are well-known characters in all Siouan tales.

first created, was made of stone, and had one leg or foot broken off, either by being dropped or by cracking off as he lay before the fire to dry, so another was made to be the progenitor of the human race, which thereby incurred his enmity. The chief account of him concerns his hand-to-hand conflict with Bladder.

A characteristic story of Bladder, as a smart man who makes a fool of himself, describes minutely his diving into the water after plums that he saw reflected there. In the far northwest the plums become buffalo berries, and among the Cheyennes instead of plums it is buffalo meat hung on the limb of a cottonwood tree to dry.

But all accounts agree that he dived again and again and *again*, the fourth time fastening stones to his wrists, ankles, and neck to drag himself down, and all but drowning before he could liberate himself. Then, as he lay gasping on the ground, his face turned upward and he saw the desired object over his head!

In the great duel, the Monster struck off the head of Bladder, and it flew up and up into the Divine Presence, where it asked, "Shall I kill him" (with reference to his opponent). Receiving no response, it fell upon the neck where it belonged, and was reunited. Bladder then, in his turn, struck off the head of the Monster, and exactly the same thing occurred as to the head of Bladder. These blows were repeated in turn, for the conflict grew out of an Indian ball game. Since Bladder suffered first, he was first to ask permission to kill his adversary *for the fourth time*, at which he received permission, and while the head of the Monster was in the air, he pushed aside the body. *Not falling upon its wonted place, the head of the Monster rebounded and continues to rebound to this day in the form of the sun!*

Except the conclusion, this story may be told to any man, woman, or child; but only old men or wise men are initiated into the secret that the sun is the head of the monster, worshiped in the Sun Dance, instituted by Bladder.

There were brothers made for Bladder, so there were eight all told. Six of these had been captured, slain, flayed, eaten, and their skins inflated with air. The principle of life was in these skins, and after the duel they were transformed into clouds by the power of Bladder.

The youngest had been captured, but was not slain. He became the Morning Star. Sometimes the seven appear as the Seven Stars. All this is known to the young men, the women, and the children.

But only the initiated are to know that the Bladder himself is the sky, the part of which that we see being the inner surface of his thorax, we being in the cavity of the thorax, which appears as a skinbag in the Turtle story.

As was said, one version makes the Turtle antedate the Monster

and Bladder. Our account implies that the Turtle is the son of Bladder and that the Thunder Bird is the mother of the Turtle, who taught the art of war.

All accounts agree that the Turtle was eventually caught in a skinbag, or under a basket or kettle. His further adventures, shrewd answers, and contest with the otter are known to the men, women, and children. Only the initiated are to know that the Turtle is the earth and that we inhabit the shell on his back.

After the second character in his ridiculous career, comes the Rabbit as a favorite with the boys and girls. His adventures were many, and he is supposed to have introduced the social feast.

Bladder, in his character of the sky, still retained some of his old habits. Once the Rabbit met him. Bladder was hunting, and kept throwing one of his eyes up in the treetops to look for game. He taught the rabbit how to do the same, instructing him to *change eyes after using one four times*. Unfortunately, the poor Rabbit did not take into account the first time, when, as he thought, he was only making a trial. So he failed to get his eye back after throwing it up the fifth time.

This is known to the men, women, and children. Many things are told of the mice eating the Rabbit's eye and the expedients by which he tried to regain possession of the lost member. One account makes him get the eye of another animal.

The initiated know that the eye of the Rabbit is the moon, and that the figure we see on the face of the full moon is the reflection of the Rabbit in his own eye, as we see ourselves reflected in the eye of a friend if we look closely.

Such is the aboriginal mythology, if our information is correct. The account has been quite useful as a sort of introduction to members of several tribes whose confidence was desirable. None professed to be entirely ignorant. None knew and agreed with it in all points. Most professed to know it in part and were desirous of knowing the whole. A few offered corrections of different portions.

One suggested that the medicine lodge combines the Sioux legend of the Monster and Bladder with the Algonquin legend of the Rabbit and the Iroquois legend of the Turtle. In the original, he said, both heads went on rebounding unto this day in the form of sun and moon, and in the original Rabbit story the other eye was thrown up to regain possession of the first, one eye being the sun, the other the moon.

Another suggests that the Monster represents the chief of those who were here when the Indians came and who were destroyed for the sake of their wives, the new-comers being braves only. The story states that Bladder and his brothers took the wives of the

Monster. He further conjectures that the original Bladder was a French refugee who feigned insanity, represented himself as the first of the human race, and coined the tales of his exploits to secure his own safety.

The Turtle, he thinks, was a renegade Delaware who fought his own people; the Rabbit, the son of a mulatto woman and a Mohawk Indian, which accounts for the saying that "The Rabbit owes his power to the fact that he is the son of the sky, the nephew of the sun, and the brother of the earth," a saying meant to mystify the uninitiated, but simply meaning that Turtle is the son of Bladder and father of the Rabbit.

These conjectures as to the origin of the stories seem uncalled for, but may be in part correct. Such personages may have taken advantage of the general belief and claimed for themselves the characters in question, adding to the tales their own exploits, real or imaginary.

It matters little to the Indian boy who earns the story by contributing the large stick to keep fire in the lodge all night and who firmly believes that a Rabbit story would bring on a winter's storm at any season, that if he hears stories in summer he will step on a snake next day, and that to tell children stories in the daytime will make them grow humpbacked.

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PINE RIDGE AGENCY.